

Message Text

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13

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1789

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SUBJ: STRAWS IN WIND ABOUT EARLY AUSTRALIAN GENERAL
ELECTIONS

REF: A) SYDNEY 2331 B) CANBERRA 5376 C) MELBOURNE 1009

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: GROWING INFLATION, SPREADING RASH OF
ANNOYING STRIKES, CONCERN OVER CONFUSED MINERALS POLICY
OF GOVERNMENT, AND CONTROVERSY WITHIN ALP OVER REFERENDA
ON PRICES AND INCOMES HAVE COMBINED TO PUT GOVERNMENT IN
WEAKEST POLITICAL POSITION SINCE IT ASSUMED POWER IN
DECEMBER, 1972. ALP FEDERAL EXECUTIVE MEETING IN
ADELAIDE, OCT. 5-6, AND JOINT LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTY
EXECUTIVE MEETING IN CANBERRA OCT. 9 WILL HAVE DECISIVE
EFFECT ON WHETHER NEW GENERAL ELECTIONS ARE IMMINENT.

END SUMMARY.

2. AUSTRALIAN PRESS AND POLITICAL CIRCLES HAVE BEEN
FILLED THIS WEEK WITH SPECULATION ABOUT EARLY GENERAL
ELECTIONS, CONSEQUENT ON GROWING INFLATION, SPREADING

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ELECTIONS, CONSEQUENT ON GROWING INFLATION, SPREADING

LABOR DISPUTES (SYDNEY CATALOG OF STRIKES IN REF A), CONCERN OVER CONFUSED MINERALS POLICY OF MINISTER FOR MINERALS AND ENERGY CONNOR, AND CONTROVERSY WITHIN ALP OVER CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUMS ON PRICES AND INCOMES (REFS B AND C).

3. PROCESS WAS SPARKED BY REMARKS BY FORMER PRIME MINISTER GORTON IN TV INTERVIEW SEPT 30, WHEN HE SUGGESTED OPPOSITION PARTIES IN SENATE, WHICH HAVE SMALL BUT RELIABLE MAJORITY, SHOULD BLOCK APPROPRIATIONS BILLS AND THUS FORCE DOUBLE DISSOLUTION OR AT LEAST DISSOLUTION OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. LIBERAL OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN HAS CAUTIOUSLY FENCED WITH SUGGESTION, EXPRESSING INTEREST IN EARLY ELECTIONS BUT EMPHASIZING THAT ELECTIONS SHOULD BE HELD ON MAJOR ISSUE. LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTY EXECUTIVES WILL JOINTLY MEET IN CANBERRA OCT 9 TO DISCUSS TACTICS. DEMOCRATIC LABOR PARTY HAS EXPRESSED INTEREST IN EARLY ELECTIONS, BUT DLP LEADER SENATOR GAIR, IN OBLIQUE SWIPE AT RECENT HOSTILE COMMENTS ON DLP BY SNEDDEN (REF B), HAS COMMENTED THAT DLP WOULD WANT TO BE SURE THAT GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD COME OUT OF NEW ELECTIONS WOULD BE IMPROVEMENT OVER PRESENT GOVERNMENT.

4. OF AT LEAST EQUAL SIGNIFICANCE TO RESOLUTION OF PRESENT SPECULATION IS ALP FEDERAL EXECUTIVE MEETING TO BE HELD IN ADELAIDE OCT 5 AND 6. RANGE OF ISSUES WILL BE CONSIDERED THERE, WITH PROPECTS THAT ALP EXECUTIVE WILL REJECT ENDORSEMENT OF PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY POSITION ON REFERENDUM ON INCOMES (REF C). HOWEVER, AS REF C MAKES CLEAR, ALP PRESIDENT (AND ALSO PRESIDENT OF ACTU) HAWKE IS EQUALLY ANNOYED WITH PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM'S FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE ADEQUATELY WITH HIS SUPPORTERS. NATURALLY, IF ALP FEDERAL EXECUTIVE IN EFFECT REPUDIATES GOVERNMENT, LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTY EXECUTIVES WILL BE STRONGLY TEMPTED TO PUSH FOR EARLY ELECTIONS.

5. NORMALLY PRO-LABOR AUSTRALIAN PRESS HAS BEEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INCREASINGLY CRITICAL OF GOVERNMENT ACROSS WHOLE RANGE OF ISSUES MENTIONED IN PARA ONE ABOVE. THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT THAT INCREASINGLY ANNOYING RASH OF STRIKES, AS WELL AS GOVERNMENT'S PERCEIVED INABILITY TO DO ANYTHING ABOUT THEM, IS HAVING NEGATIVE EFFECT ON STANDING OF FEDERAL LABOR GOVERNMENT. DEPARTMENT IS AWARE FROM PREVIOUS EMBASSY REPORTING OF VULNERABLE POLITICAL POSITION OF LABOR GOVERNMENT, AS REFLECTED

IN PUBLIC OPINION POLLS OVER PAST SEVERAL MONTHS,
VICTORIAN STATE ELECTIONS IN MAY, AND PARAMATTA BY-
ELECTION IN SYDNEY AREA SEPT 22.

6. LABOR GOVERNMENT SHOULD WEATHER CURRENT PROBLEMS,
IF THE MAJOR STRIKES ARE RESOLVED SOON AND IF ALP
EXECUTIVE MEETING HOLDS BACK FROM PUBLIC DENUNCIATION
OF GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, WHITLAM IS IN WEAKEST
POSITION YET SINCE ASSUMING POWER. WE WILL BE IN
BETTER POSITION TO JUDGE THIS FAST-DEVELOPING SITUA-
TION NEXT WEEK.GREEN

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